



IN THE FIELD



It all started with an “Etch A Sketch” and a Dr. Seuss dictionary. Maria Gonzalez, a regional contracting officer for the Deschutes National Forest, began drawing at the age of four. The dictionary, a gift from her parents to help her learn to speak English, along with her native Spanish, provided inspiration for her whimsical artistic style. Her first medium: the “Etch A Sketch,” which she quickly learned how to manipulate to create rounded lines and intricate designs. She worked at it so frequently that the silver material inside began to pour out.

Today, Gonzalez is going on 30 years with the U.S. Forest Service. She started her career with the agency as a co-op student working in contracting on the Siuslaw National Forest, located on the central Oregon coast. As a contracting officer she works on awarding contracts and construction bids, as well as, overseeing property and purchasing. After working on the Siuslaw, Gonzalez took a job on the Colville National Forest, in northeastern Washington, for six years. Following her time on the Colville, Gonzalez accepted her current position on the Deschutes National Forest.



Maria Gonzalez

Regional Contracting Officer

DESCHUTES
**National
Forest**

“Working for the Forest Service means opportunities,” believes Gonzalez, whose favorite part about her position is being able to see projects from the beginning stages on paper to implementation on the ground. “You can go as far as you want, as far as you push yourself. It takes persistence, but there are so many opportunities and trainings offered to you.”

Gonzalez’s dedication to the Forest Service, however, hasn’t eliminated her passion for drawing. Although she doesn’t have as much time for it as she wishes, she has a collection of nearly a hundred completed works, including several pages she’s illustrated for a future series of children’s books.

The main character, a noble horse, always dressed in his signature polka-dotted blanket, was inspired by a plow horse that lived next door to Gonzalez during her childhood. In her book series, a project she hopes to complete after retirement, Gonzalez illustrates intricate images, complete with hidden faces in the designs, of the horse and his trusty rooster companion on adventures.

Most of Gonzalez’s work focuses on animals, infused with humor and a dose of fantasy. She begins by sketching the design in pencil, then going over it in fine-tipped pen before adding color with markers.

“When you draw from the imagination, you can go as far as you want,” says Gonzalez, who once got in trouble during college for drawing her own version of a tree instead of the one outside they had been instructed



to copy.

Although Gonzalez is excited to spend more time working on her art after retirement, her dedication to the Forest Service is evident. Aside from her daily job in contracting, she also serves on an incident management team working in buying.

“I love being part of the buying team,” explains Gonzalez, who responds to not only fire incidents, but also natural disasters, such as Hurricane Ivan. “I get to travel and see beautiful places, while also meeting new people from different agencies.”

Gonzalez has come a long way since a camping trip that she took around age eight with her family. As she ventured off to find her brother, her mother called out, “Let me know if you see Smokey Bear!”

“And who would have thought,” smiles Gonzalez. “Here I am working for the Forest Service. I can’t say enough about how good it is. I know I probably wouldn’t be able to see the things I do without the Forest Service.”